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## VARIÉTÉ

### **“SHARDANA PROJECT” PERSPECTIVES AND RESEARCHES ON THE SHERDEN IN EGYPT AND MEDITERRANEAN**

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Since 2008 the ‘Shardana Project’ (**fig. 1**) developed by the Centre of Studies J.-Fr. Champollion on Egyptology and Coptic Civilization and settled in Genoa in cooperation with the University of Genoa and the University of the Mediterranean in Taranto, has aimed to all data about the Sherden culture inside and outside Pharaonic Egypt. The project is the result of a joint work among staff members of the three institutions mentioned above. It is based on a systematic study on available data conducted by the present writer from 2002 to 2006 <sup>1</sup>.

The available data on Sherden in Ancient Egypt, covering the XVIII-XXII dynasties, actually represents the most relevant and essential core of sources of the historical phenomenon in the Mediterranean Late Bronze Age and an excellent starting point for further investigations inside and outside the Nile Valley. Thus this project can be considered an ‘ideal laboratory’ where Egyptian and non-Egyptian data collected can be analyzed by a multi-disciplinary approach.

The multi-directional exchange of knowledge and different experiences in the management of problems related to the analysis of archaeological data of ‘Sea Peoples’ in the Mediterranean Basin is assumed as a means to understanding the cultural aspects of Sherden people in Ramesside Egypt and the grade of acquisition of Egyptian culture visible in it.

The aims of this research project are:

- To collect all data recorded in a useful database also available on the web;
- To use the available data as a fixed and a starting point further research in archaeological sites investigated or in the process of excavation, in museums and private collections in the Mediterranean Basin;
- To make a reassessment of ‘Sherden history’ in Pharaonic Egypt by data collected and to contribute with a scientific analysis to the ‘Sea Peoples’ phenomenon.

The database organization is planned into three main branches, each of which could be further divided into sub branches (if necessary). The three main branches are as follows: warfare and military activities; settlements and social life and culture; religion and language.



Figure 1. The project's logo.

1. CAVILLIER 2003, 2005 with bibliography.

It is fundamental to illustrate briefly the state of the studies and the perspectives of the research related to each specific sector of the project.

### STATE OF THE STUDIES

A deep analysis of Sherden's status and functions in Ramesside Egypt allowed us to define two distinct phases in the management of mercenaries run by the Crown: the first phase covers the reign of Ramesses II wherein the warriors formed a cohesive and elite group within the royal guard; the second phase lasts from the Merenptah reign until the end of XX dynasty wherein the Sherden warriors appeared in the ranks of the army, together with other foreign mercenary groups, as professionals with short-distance weapons.

In the second phase of the management, the central authority's attempt is significant in preserving Sherden's identity as professionals of the combat. Although in this period they were fully entitled owners of plots of land in Middle and Upper Egypt, the long process of their social assimilation appears inexorable by now.

Under the strictly military profile, the textual sources reveal a certain continuity in the employment of mercenaries in Egyptian strongholds and fortresses in the Nile Valley during the XIX and XX dynasties, even if no existent archaeological data confirmed it, since the current impossibility to ascribe specific cultural elements to the Sherden in order to disclose their presence in garrisons and fortifications <sup>2</sup>.

However in other textual sources the mercenaries are settled in some centres in Middle Egypt, called 'Strongholds of Sherden' <sup>3</sup>; therefore in absence of specific field investigations, it is obviously hard to establish if these forts were really Sherden, even in their fundamental elements (plan, wall enclosure, defence structures and inner order of the edifices). It is also difficult to determine their function inside the Ramesside complex strategic system for the control of the territories inside and outside Egypt <sup>4</sup>. It is also noticeable that the absence of archaeological traces of 'Sherden fortified structures' in Nile Valley, instead could presume their presence in the foreign territories under the Egyptian control; nevertheless this assertion discloses the dilemma as to whether these Egyptian strongholds were called Sherden because of the presence of mercenaries' garrison or if they were settled and utilized by the mercenaries. It is clear that this second option, a more tempting view for many scholars, requires an accurate definition of the Sherden's cultural background.

During the period of our interest in identifying aspects of the Sherden's culture in Canaan, an effort dates back to the year 2002 when A. Zertal believed that the stone circular structures, discovered on the site El-Ahwat, have to be ascribed to the mercenaries <sup>5</sup>. In his opinion the considerable similarity between the structures of El-Ahwat and those of the Nuragic centres, the presence *in situ* of Egyptian

2. For ex., the circular stone structures near the walls revealed in the Ramses II fortress of Zawyet Umm el-Rakham, attested in the same position in Ramses III fortress at Tell el-Retaba and at Ehnasya el-Medina at the end of Ramesside age. In Snape's view, the Zawyet Umm el-Rakham structures are not for dwelling nor for storage but probably structures for mercenaries or "part of a Libyan squatter camp". Inside the Ramses II fort there are also traces of a cultic room of typical Canaanite style (Bassemah) with inscribed royal cartouches and the name of the chief-fort. These interesting elements, probably ascribed with reason to the Libyans on Snape theory, indeed, give an alternative view (purely speculative) of a mercenary group as Sherden, at the time more linked to the pharaoh and with more connections with Levantine and Canaanite culture as XVIII dynasty textual data suggest. The presence of Sherden in northern Delta during the Ramses II reign is confirmed by the so-called 'Sherden Stela', as well as, the Pazegef stela founded in temple of Hershef at Ehnasya el-Medina by Petrie in 1900, confirms the presence of mercenaries here. CAVILLIER 2005, p. 12, 33.

3. In these two sources, the stela of Sethemheb and the tomb inscription of general Men-Maat-Ra-Nekhtw (reign of Ramses VII-IX), are attested "five strongholds of the Sherden" and the "great strongholds of Sherden"; *ibid.*, p. 33, 62-63. It is not possible to establish if this term indicates a specific function of these structures or a simple 'attribution' of it to the mercenaries, but it appears decisive to understand the true role of these warriors in this period.

4. CAVILLIER 2001; MORRIS 2005; CAVILLIER 2006.

5. ZERTAL & ROMANO 1999, p. 32-34; ZERTAL 2001, p. 215-32.

objects and Mycenaean pottery corroborate the existence of a Sherden fortress serving Egypt; furthermore in Zertal's opinion, the archaeological data of El-Ahwat confirm the mercenaries' Sardinian origin <sup>6</sup>. However the Sherden-Sardinia correspondence is based on the typical idea that the Nuragic centres can function as elements of comparison and dating <sup>7</sup>. The recent archaeological investigations undertaken by the University of Granada in site of Motilla Del Azuer and El Argar (Spain) <sup>8</sup> demonstrate the limits of this unique connection between the Sherden and Sardinia, since the presence of large rounded fortified structures in the above mentioned sites, is probably older than the Sardinian complexes. The data on the relationships between the Levant and Sardinia only show the presence of the Mycenaean pottery in Sardinia, Nuragic pottery in Crete and in south-east Sicily, as well as copper ox-hide ingots from Sardinia, Crete and Cyprus which confirm the existence of an East-West trade along different sea routes <sup>9</sup>.

Therefore if it is still difficult to establish connections between Sardinia and the Sherden, some cultural markers recently emerged in Levant can be attributed directly to these mercenaries. Indeed, in a recent study, M. Bietak and R. Jung <sup>10</sup> have pointed out that the Egyptian long swords found at Tell el-Far'aun and at Ras Shamra and dated to 1200-1100 cent. BC belong to the typological group called Naue II and are linked to the regions of Central Europe, Italy and the Balkan peninsula. In Egypt and in the Levant these long swords were fabricated locally but derived from European prototypes that probably reached the Aegean and Levant from Italy. Thus, on Bietak's view “the long swords in question having royal names cut into the blade, probably for high rank officers and the personal guard of pharaoh such as the Sherden had been”. A meticulous analysis conducted on these data confirms the diffusion of Naue II prototypes in Egypt, the Aegean and the Levant but, as it is understandable, the real use of these swords by Sherden as royal guard after the reign of Ramses II remains problematic.

In sum, there is a strict relationship between sword production and diffusion from Egypt, the Levant and Italy and a similar relationship of metal and pottery production and diffusion from Sardinia and Egypt, the Levant, Crete and Cyprus; the phenomena are parallel but not coincident, incisive but not decisive. Therefore it is still an open question as to whether a group of skilled sailors left Sardinia to reach Egypt, Canaan and the Levant, where they established themselves as mercenaries, or on the contrary, if this people came from the Eastern Mediterranean (Egypt also) to Sardinia to stay. Actually, the little evidence of this phenomenon is not still completely compatible with these suppositions; the data could rather reveal only a certain interaction (or even a coincidence) outside Egypt among Mediterranean sites like Sardinia, Cyprus and the Levant.

6. In many conferences and communications about his research the scholar asserts that the Ramesside garrison of El-Ahwat is composed of Sherden warriors under the command of an Egyptian official called *Sisere*. Actually, this supposition is not confirmed by the available Egyptian sources nor is any presence or production of ‘Nuragic pottery’ by Sherden in Nile Valley attested.

7. For debate on the identification: FINKELSTEIN 2002, p. 187-199; FINKELSTEIN & PIASETZY 2007. For the presence of People of Sea in Canaan: NEGBI 1991, p. 205-243; *id.*, 1998, p. 184-207; OREN 2000.

8. The sites, known as ‘motillas’, represent one of the most peculiar types of prehistoric settlements in the Iberian Peninsula. They occupied the region of La Mancha in the Bronze Age between 2200 and 1500 BC, and they are artificial mounds, 4 to 10 m high, a result of the destruction of a stone fortification of central plan with several concentric walled lines. Its distribution in the plain of La Mancha, with equidistances of 4 to 5 km, affects river meadows and low areas where the existence of pools was quite frequent until recent dates. Although they were already known since the end of the 19th cent., the ‘motillas’ were erroneously considered to be burial mounds until the middle of the seventies, when the start of the research work on the Motilla del Azuer carried out by the University of Granada and sponsored by the Department of Culture of Castilla La Mancha showed that it was a fortification, surrounded by a small settlement and a necropolis. It has been the first site of this kind to be excavated in a scientific and systematic way. In the establishment of the El Argar settlements around Daimiel they began to build a new type of stone fortress complex; something that had never been seen before. The site of Motilla Del Azuer is dated to 1500 BC and consists of a circular roughly-worked stone fortress of 50 m in diameter, with a central tower, concentric walled enclosures, and a large courtyard. In Spanish scholars' views “these fortified settlements carried out an important function in the control and management of critical resources, especially water, obtained through the excavated well, and large quantities of cereals”: *cfr.* NÁJERA & MOLINA 2004a, p. 173-214; *id.*, 2004b, p. 35-48.

9. VAGNETTI 2000, p. 305-326; LO SCHIAVO 2003, p. 15-34; *id.*, 2004, p. 20-23.

10. BIETAK & JUNG 2007-2008, p. 212-233 with bibliography.

In a similar way to what happens in the Mediterranean, the situation in Egypt is characterized by a lack of archaeological data. Thus no definition of the phenomenon can be possible; the textual sources of the XX dynasty inform us that directly connected with some military fortresses and relevant centres (principally in Fayyum) there were settlements dedicated to the mercenaries and their families. The analysis of these sources (Ramesside papyri *Amiens* and *Wilbour*)<sup>11</sup> confirms the idea that the distribution of Sherden (in ‘community-villages’ and in ‘single tenure’ near the principal fortified sites as Cinopolis, Aphroditopolis, Herakleopolis, Oxyrinchus, Crocodilopolis, Gurob and Hermopolis) was coherent and subjected to strategic purpose to collect and organize the mercenaries in short time for every danger or necessity.

The *Pap. Wilbour* shows a most clear view about the management of Sherden settlements in the Fayyum area; during the XX dynasty the introduction of a ‘single tenure’ of land in add to ‘village-communities’ is a noteworthy means to control the mercenaries. Indeed close to every group of these small communities the tenures of Egyptian officers are attested under whose command there were the mercenaries<sup>12</sup>.

Nevertheless, excluding few documented toponyms (but not investigated in an archaeological way)—for example, the ‘villas’ of *Sako*, *Spermeru* and *Yaya*, the ‘villages’ of *Inroyshes*, *Irkak*, *Djasarti*, *Pen-Ren-ib*, the ‘hills’ of *Nahihu* and *Djajabw*, the ‘houses’ (Pr) of *Iker*, *Wayna*, *Medjat*, *Qmaa*, *Paserw*, *Tjawati*, the “tenure” of *Meryra*, the *temple of Seth*, the *temple of Amon God of the return*—the other terms used to indicate the location of mercenaries’ settlements in Middle Egypt are still difficult to identify<sup>13</sup>.

Another interesting aspect that emerges from the available textual sources is the social relationship between mercenaries and the local communities of Egyptians. As a matter of fact, from this profile we can easily suppose that every Sherden community had a strict relationship with the Egyptians in the area where it settled. Direct proof of this supposition came from the so-called ‘Adoption papyrus’ (reign of Ramses XI)<sup>14</sup> in which two Sherden named *Pakamen* and *Satameniw* act as witnesses. They were joined to four local stable-masters for an adoption procedure probably in the *Spermeru* region. The implications of the act are relevant for Sherden’s social position because they confirm that these mercenaries performed as legal figures for Egyptian people with whom they probably had a daily relationship.

Another interesting element comes out of the document and it is the presence of a wife of a Sherden named *Adjejo*. In the document the existence of a woman, so well-defined as ‘wife’, opens a question on the mercenaries’ customs of marriage and their juridical implications for Egyptian society. This occurs because in the sources of the XX dynasty most of the Sherden names attested are Egyptian, consequently it is arduous to ascertain if and under what conditions the Sherden status was transferred from father to the sons in case of legal or illegal unions.

Another important feature of the culture, religion and language recognized as being of the Sherden comes from the *Pap. Wilbour*. The ‘text A’ (81.32) attests a man named *Imna* who is possessor of a land of five *arure* “south-west of the temple of Sobek” that acts as *sprw Šbk n Šrdn* “hunter of the crocodiles of the Sherden”. The relationship between the Sherden and the Sobek cult appears not so strange in a

11. GARDINER 1941, p. 19-73; *id.*, 1948; MENU 1970; *id.*, 1983; *id.*, 1986; *id.*, 2004; O’CONNOR 1972, p. 681-98; *id.*, 1989, p. 259-93; ALLAM 1994; CAVILLIER 2007, p. 105-110.

12. In the *Pap. Wilbour* are attested 13 t3y-šrit in the areas with the highest presence of Sherden as *Yaya*, *Irkak*, *Djasarti* and *Spermeru*: cf. *ibid.*, p. 107.

13. *Sycamores of the king’s land*, *Region in the North of the wall of Pa-tjesy-hour*, *Maniw-Meron*, *Land of Ramses-Miamun in the North of the city of Sasa*, *Land of Usimaatra- Setepenra of the temple of Amon in North of the city of Pa-Ihay*, *Island of Amon*, *Stable of Horus (Tract of Hardai)*, *Pakhernekheb-ca (?)*, *Fortress of Onayna*, *Basin of Sharope in the Lake of Sycamore*, *Sycamores of Irkak*, *Lake of the king on South of Nayroti*, *Village of Tuthmosi*, *Village of Ira*, *Plantation of Saga*, *Village of Wara*, *Temple of Ptah*. The detailed study is still valid for the toponyms and their transliteration GARDINER 1948, p. 107-108.

14. GARDINER 1941, p. 24-28.

region where this god is prominent, but the attribution of 5 arure of land for the specific job of *Imna* in favour of the Sherden appears an interesting peculiarity <sup>15</sup>.

In the ‘text B’ (B 9.x+2) collective tenure is attested in “North of the Yaya region” for the Pr-ntr n Šrdn “*temple of the god of the Sherden*”. The handwriting adopted by the scribe suggests a cult dedicated to a Sherden god, and the existence of this structure in the *Yaya* region in the territory of Hardai opens also the question on religious customs ascribable to the mercenaries.

Connected with cultic aspects is the matter of the language adopted by the Sherden. The only available source is the Pazegef stela found by Petrie in the temple of Hershef of Herakleopolis (Ehnasya el-Medina) <sup>16</sup>. The important point of this source is that the Sherden Pazegef of the stronghold of Wsr-Maat-Ra figures not only as offering to the gods Hershef and Hathor, but the language used in the document seems to be Egyptian, even if in an abnormal hieratic form, but essentially Egyptian <sup>17</sup>.

Last but not least, there is the remarkable presence of mercenaries in Nubia at the end of Ramesside age. In the Wḥm-mswt papyri the Sherden play a part as royal guards dispatched in Nubia (probably in Kuban-Aniba forts) with Paiankh in his Nubian campaign against the rebel Panehesi <sup>18</sup>. Textual sources do not indicate if the Sherden returned from Nubia with Paiankh after the campaign or if they were garrisoned there for a longer time. A detailed study of the available sources on Nubian sites and especially on Paiankh figure will add new data for clearing the question <sup>19</sup>.

### PERSPECTIVES

By this synthetic view of the little available data on the phenomenon and their potential for researches, the perspectives of the project intend firstly to create a direct connection among all available archaeological data from recent investigations in Egyptian fortified sites (for example those along the western and eastern Delta, the settlements in the Fayyum and in Thebaid area) and those sites where the presence of mercenaries is presumable, in order to identify Sherden’s cultural features.

Secondly, the results obtained will be compared with all information available from other archaeological contexts in the Mediterranean basin to underline interconnections and diversity.

Thirdly, the data collected after the necessary analysis and filters will be organized for every contribution with other projects developed by the Centre Champollion and its scientific partners in the common efforts to comprehend the Sherden culture.

In conclusion, with the indispensable employment of new data the ‘Progetto Shardana’ could be an important means by which to exchange information, to spread the results of cooperation with other Euro-Mediterranean Partnerships and to stimulate scientific debate on this interesting issue.

15. The identification of the temple of Sobek attested in the papyrus is still difficult; in fact, the absence of the relative position induces to hypothesize that the temple was in the same region of *Sako* - tract of Hardai of the settlement mentioned at the row before. For Gardiner this cultic centre was at El-Kes in the north of Hardai but no textual or archaeological data prove the presence *in situ* of a temple dedicated to Sobek. GARDINER 1948, p. 50-51.

16. PETRIE 1904-1905, pl. 27.2; CAVILLIER 2005, p. 33

17. The study of the stela is still in process because a complete translation of the abnormal hieratic text is difficult because of unreadable signs and syntactical forms employed by the sculptor and especially because the document after its discovery was probably acquired by private collectors. Some data about the translation of the stela has been communicated in IXth International Congress of Egyptologists and in the 11<sup>th</sup> International Nubian Conference but in absence of the stela to make correct comparisons the results obtained rest mere suppositions: CAVILLIER 2004, p. 22; CAVILLIER 2010.

18. Pap.BM 10326, Pap.BM 10375, Pap.Turin 2026: CAVILLIER 2005, p. 32, 58-61; CAVILLIER 2010.

19. A parallel project of research developed by the Centre Champollion is dedicated to the scribe of the necropolis Butehamon (XX-XXI dynasties). This figure is relevant to the knowledge of the Paiankh figure for Ramesside history and the relationships from the crown and the administration of the Theban necropolis at the end of New Kingdom; see ČERNÝ 1973, app. D.

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